

## A Study of Domestic Violence against Married Women in Afghanistan: Grounded Theory

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Domestic violence against women is currently one of the most important and characteristic forms of violence against human rights, which is associated with negative psychological and physical health consequences. The persistence of domestic violence causes marital incompatibility and has countless consequences for women. The aim of this study was to investigate domestic violence against married women in Bamyan province (Afghanistan).

**Methods:** This research was conducted using the qualitative method and grounded theory. The study population included all women with domestic violence in Bamyan province in 2019. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to achieve theoretical saturation. Those women who were eligible for the study were given in-depth semi-structured interviews, and finally 12 women were selected. The data were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin method with three stages of open, axial, and selective coding.

**Results:** In this study, 297 concepts, 31 categories, 15 sub-categories, and 5 main categories including cultural poverty, personality problems and husband's irresponsibility, panic, women's awakening, and low self-esteem were extracted. Also, all these 5 main categories were represented as a sub-category of "home terrorism".

**Conclusions:** Although women in Bamyan are still victims of domestic violence, increasing women's awareness and education in this field have been able to make women safe to some extent.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Domestic Violence, Domestic Terrorism, Married Women, Afghanistan.

## Introduction

Violence refers to any threatening behavior or psychological, physical, sexual, financial, or emotional abuse committed by one person against another in a relationship (Netto, Pawson, & Sharp, 2009). The victims of domestic violence are often women and children. Concerns about the abuse of women have increased in recent decades, and national and international organizations have begun to conduct scientific research and find new dimensions of the problem (Meseguer-Santamaría, Sánchez-Alberola, & Vargas-Vargas, 2021). According to statistics published by the WHO, one in three women is subjected to domestic violence during their lifetime (Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise & Watts, 2006). The United Nations (1993) defined violence against women as any form of gender-based violence that, in addition to being harmful to women, also constitutes deprivation of their individual or social liberty (Ali, Morgan, & Krantz, 2013). However, women in different societies, cultures, and ethnicities interpret domestic violence in different ways (Fanslow, Robinson, Crengé & Perese, 2010, as cited in Afrooz, Crips & Taket, 2021). This phenomenon occurs in all countries of the world. Outside of the borders of culture, there is social and economic class, education, ethnicity, and age (Talebpour, 1396). Sometimes, women are so discouraged by the violence that they may not even report it, but at the same time it is seen that changes are taking place in this regard (Gardsbane, Bukuluki & Musuya, 2021). Meanwhile, unrest can increase the likelihood of violence against women and children (Dahal, Khanal, Maharjan, Panthi & Nepal, 2020) and it seems that given the conditions, the ground for the spread of such violence is prepared in Afghanistan. This type of violence is significantly associated with consequences such as gynecology and mortality (Ruiz-Perez, Plazaola-Castano, Del Rio-Lozano, 2007). In this regard, various studies have reported different consequences for violence against women, including: heart disease, gastric

ulcer (Kiss, Schraiber, Heise, Zimmerman, Gouveia, & Watts., 2012; Ruiz-Pérez, I., Plazaola-Castaño, J., & del Río-Lozano, 2007; Jori, Morales, Boivin, Samayoa, 2008), depression, stress, post-trauma, stress disorder, fear, anxiety, isolation, negative attitudes toward marriage and intimate relationships, nutritional problems, sexual disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (Berger, Bogen & Dulani, 2002 and Ezazi, 2003), feeling of inadequacy in management of family and work environment, and taking refuge to psychotropic drugs, alcohol, and drugs (Ghazanfari, 2010). Turk, Celik, Çetin, & Soydan (2017) reported that 83.3% of women were exposed to domestic violence by their husbands and the main causes of domestic violence were "financial problems, lack of education, and lack of love and respect between couples."

The passage of the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women is one of the most important things that the Government of Afghanistan has done over the past ten years to eliminate discrimination and violence against women, but regarding the new condition in Afghanistan, it is somewhat complicated. The advantage of this study over what has been done before is that various studies and reports on violence against women in Afghanistan are more general. None of the previous research has penetrated the family to seek out violence from women who have experienced it. Given the growing trend of violence against women, it is necessary to study violence against women through a qualitative method that investigates such issues more accurately. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to investigate the experience of violence against married women in Afghanistan through a qualitative study of this experience.

## Methods

The present study used the grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1990) and the research population consisted of women living in Yekehwalang city, the center of Bamyan province

in Afghanistan in 2019, who experienced domestic violence by their husbands in their joint life. The inclusion criteria were: being married, living with a spouse in a home, experiencing domestic violence in relation to the spouse, and the desire to participate in the research.

To collect the sample, the snowball sampling method was used in such a way that first several women who had experienced domestic violence were identified and these women introduced people who had similar conditions. For theoretical sampling, the criterion of data saturation was used, that means reaching the point where new data does not provide more new information (Polit, & Beck, 2013). Finally, after interviewing 12 women, theoretical saturation was obtained. All interviews were conducted during the summer of 2019.

In order to apply ethical considerations in the research, several points were considered: in order to achieve the informed consent of the participant, the objectives of the research were first explained to people. Due to the sensitivity of the issue, the interview was conducted in such a way that the participant did not feel embarrassed. During the interview, the voices of the participants were recorded, which was also done with the consent of the people. Fortunately, everyone allowed to do so. Participation in the study did not incur any financial costs for the interviewees. During the interpretation of the data, nicknames were used for individuals so that the real identities of the individuals were not revealed. Finally, the information obtained from the interviews was recorded without any change in meaning.

Also, in the present study, triangulation techniques were used to achieve the validation criterion. First, different sources that confirm the research were used. After the interview questions were confirmed by the supervisors, the first interview was conducted and sent to the supervisor. Other interviews were conducted after confirmation of the interview. In the second method, external inspection was used by the supervisors. The supervisors supervised and provided the necessary advice during preparing the

interview questions and analyzing them,. As it was not possible for participants to validate and evaluate the results obtained, the results of other research and reports related to the field of domestic violence in Afghanistan were used to confirm its similarity. Therefore, the validity of this research can be considered appropriate. It should be noted that this research was registered in the Ethics Committee of Yazd University with the ethics code: IR.YAZD.REC.1400.067.

In order to collect data in this study, the qualitative interview method was used in a "semi-structured" method. The duration of the interview time depended on several factors such as the number of questions and the free time of the interviewees to express their experiences and varied from 15 to 40 minutes. The interview process was as follows: after identifying married women who had experienced domestic violence, explanations about the research topic and its objectives were given to each participant and after the agreement of the research participants, the time and place of the interview were discussed. At the beginning of each interview, with the consent of the participants and ensuring the observance of fiduciary and confidentiality, the interviews were recorded using a mobile phone. To begin with, participants were asked how they felt about their experience of domestic violence or how they felt when they heard it. It should be noted that the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, depending on the convenience of the respondent and the researcher, as well as maintaining confidentiality; however, four interviews took place in the interviewer's home. At the beginning of each interview, the interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. Then, each interview was transcribed verbatim. Three steps of open, axial and selective coding were performed in data analysis.

## Results

The mean age of female participants in this study was 30.66 years. Also, more than half of the participants (58%) were housewives. In terms of

education, four participants (33%) were illiterate, and the rest of the participants had a diploma or higher. The demographic characteristics of the research sample are given in Table 1 below.

After analyzing the data, 297 concepts, 31 categories, 15 sub-categories, and 5 main categories including cultural poverty, male personality problems and irresponsibility, panic, women's awakening and decline in self-esteem were obtained. The following table shows these categories and, in the following, each of these main and sub-categories will be discussed in detail.

**Cultural Poverty:** In this study, the experiences of the participants showed that cultural poverty is a very influential factor in the spread of domestic violence. In this context, the interviewees mentioned issues such as the stubbornness of the family, which mostly referred to the restriction of women and forced marriage. For example, one participant (6) said, *"I am educated. Sometimes he does not allow me to go to school or find a better job."* There were also other cases of degrading the woman and diminishing her status. Another interviewee (12) said: *"One day I asked him where he took a sack of potatoes. and he said it's not up to you wherever I go."* Female participants also mentioned family interference. For example, one participant (9) stated: *"His mother interfered that your wife does not listen to you and sometimes she also beat me with a thick electric cable."*

**Male personality problems and irresponsibility:** Among the issues mentioned in the interviews was the frequent instability of the male. The participants believed that men's morals and spirits cause violence. *"My husband is always angry, and he is kind of aggressive, and that makes us fight, and it has become a habit for him."* said one interviewee. Participants also mentioned financial problems and male unemployment. *"Poverty affects not only the mind of men, but also the mind of all family members,"* the interviewee continued: *"But the one who gets angry and commits violence is a man."* Another important issue was the inability to meet the emotional-social needs of women. Another interviewee (8) stated that her

husband beats her over child-rearing issues: *"Sometimes, they beat me because of the child in effect that I do not take care of him".* I say I have to help myself to take better care of myself."

**Horror:** In this category, the interviewees referred to different types of violence such as physical, psychological-emotional, verbal, and financial violence. As in domestic violence, the husband creates an atmosphere of terror and forces the woman to surrender. Regarding physical violence, for example, one of the interviewees (1) said of the physical violence that her husband used against her: *"Sometimes, he has beaten her. He has beaten her with whatever means he can. For example, with a power cable, or with a wooden club."* Regarding psychological violence, for example, an interviewee (2), a 30-year-old employee, said that her husband threatened to divorce her: *"My husband said he would not be with me anymore for two days ... he insulted me more."* She goes on to say that violence is not limited to the period of her marriage, even before marriage she was tortured with psychological violence: *"I was very threatened before my marriage when I was at my uncle's house."* So, psychological violence is very widespread. Regarding the verbal violence of a 20-year-old participant, the housewife says that her husband curses her more than once, both her and her parents: *"He curses both me and my parents, too much."* Regarding financial violence, it can be said that one interviewee (5), a 26-year-old employee, says about the economic dependence of women on men as women must obey men even if the man commits violence, because women do not have financial independence. *"An afflicted woman is forced to follow her husband's words, no matter what she says, in order to meet the most basic needs, such as eating or clothing and food, which are the basic needs of a human being. She depend on her husband and she can do nothing."*

**Women's Awakening:** In this category, issues such as women's awakening and the right to femininity were mentioned. In the discussion of women's awakening, one of the ways of preventive

intervention and combating violence against women in general and domestic violence is to increase public awareness. It can be said that in the discussion of women's rights, women's rights are one of the most controversial issues in our time. The most important dispute about it is over legal differences or equality. One participant says: "Not only me, but all those who are in a violent relationship like me, are better to strengthen their self-confidence. They must cope strongly with evil and show that a woman can live her life."

**Decreased self-esteem:** In this category, some important cases were mentioned. One of these cases was the avoidance of emotional divorce. The 42-year-old participant chooses a strategy to escape the situation in order to put an end to the violence.

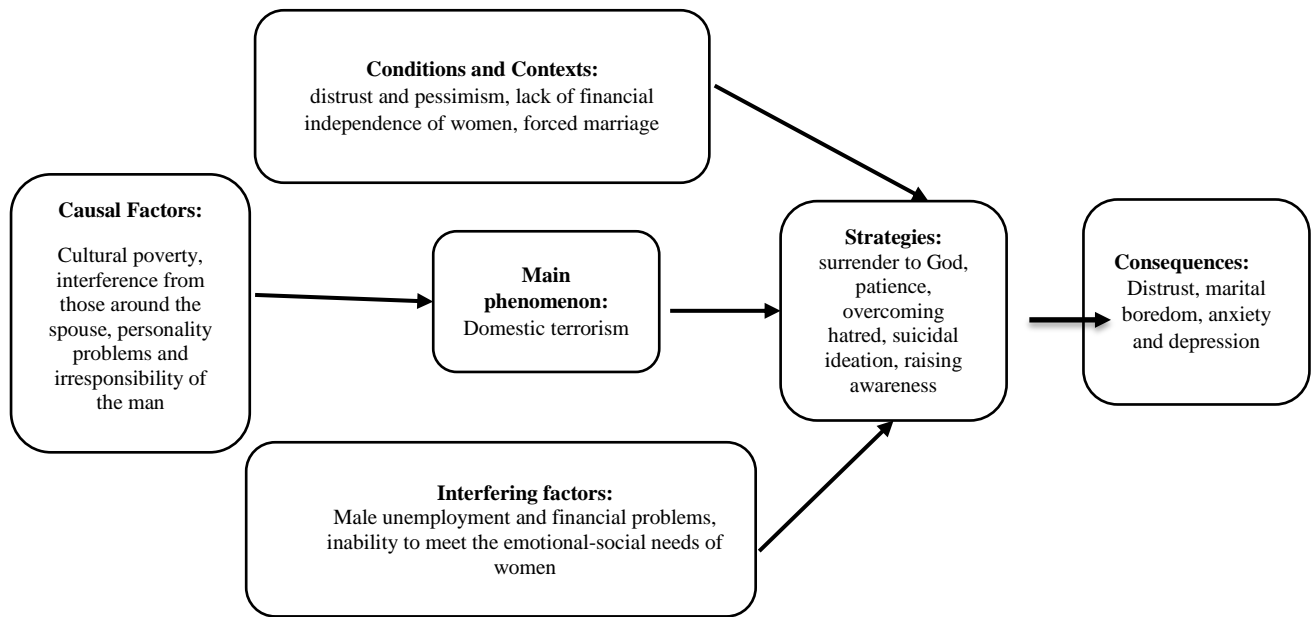
Participant (3), a 26-year-old housewife, states that she has stayed at home and does not want to go out and always has a headache: "I have stayed at home, I do not want to go anywhere. I always get a headache when the hero comes. I was depressed". Helplessness and degradation (loss of self-esteem) were also raised. Participant (1), a 26-year-old housewife, states that she feels bad about being abused and thinks that no one loves her. She thinks that she is bad, otherwise everyone else is good: "Why does he shows such an ugly behavior with me?", She says of despising her peers, that all women who are in a violent relationship, despise themselves: "The female category looks down at itself."

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of participating women

| Education    | Job       | Marriage duration | Number of Children | Age | Number |
|--------------|-----------|-------------------|--------------------|-----|--------|
| Post-diploma | Housewife | 6                 | 4                  | 26  | 1      |
| Diploma      | Employee  | 7                 | 2                  | 30  | 2      |
| Post-diploma | Housewife | 5                 | 1                  | 26  | 3      |
| Bachelor     | Teacher   | 5                 | 1                  | 27  | 4      |
| Bachelor     | Employee  | 4                 | 1                  | 26  | 5      |
| Diploma      | Teacher   | 18                | 6                  | 35  | 6      |
| Post-diploma | Teacher   | 6                 | 2                  | 32  | 7      |
| Illiterate   | Housewife | 3                 | 1                  | 20  | 8      |
| Bachelor     | Housewife | 4                 | 2                  | 25  | 9      |
| Illiterate   | Housewife | 14                | 5                  | 35  | 10     |
| Illiterate   | Housewife | 28                | 6                  | 44  | 11     |
| Illiterate   | Housewife | 26                | 6                  | 42  | 13     |

**Table 2.** The main and sub-categories of interview coding

| Nuclear categories | Main categories Subcategories                  | Main categories Subcategories   |
|--------------------|--|---|
| Domestic terrorism | Cultural poverty                               | Cultural poverty / Degradation of the status of women / Diminishing status of women / Stubborn family / Interference of those around the spouse |
|                    | Male personality problems and irresponsibility | Male character instability / Financial problems and unemployment / Inability to meet the emotional-social needs of women                        |
|                    | Terror   | Comprehensive public violence   |
|                    | Women's Awakening                              | Awakening of women / Entitlement to feminine rights / Fear of the collapse of life  |
|                    | Decreased self-esteem                          | Avoidance-Emotional Divorce / Decreased Self-Confidence / Helplessness and Inferiority (Decreased Self-Confidence)                              |



**Figure 1.** An explored paradigm model of violence against women

**Discussion**

In this study, an attempt was made to investigate violence against women using the contextual theory approach as well as what was said in the interviews. Based on the participants' responses, 5 main categories and 15 sub-categories were extracted from the interviews. The main categories included cultural poverty, male personality and irresponsibility problems, terror, women's awakening, and low self-esteem, which are discussed below.

In response to the question of what the causes of domestic violence in Afghanistan are, participants referred to issues such as cultural poverty, interference from others, personality problems and male irresponsibility. In relation to cultural poverty, it can be pointed out that education and culture play an important role in instilling the superiority of men over women, teaching men that they are superior to women and that it is their natural right for women to be their unconditional rulers (Razaghi et al, 2013). Men's personal experience of domestic violence/disrespect for women, the legitimacy of men's violence from the perspective of others and society are mentioned as the reasons for violence against women (Niazi, 2017).

In the sub-category of interference of those around the participants, they mentioned countless cases of interference of the spouse's family. Lack of separation from the families of the parties due to lack of financial independence as well as communication complexities can cause the interference of others. This finding is in line with the research by Raisi (2002), Abbaszadeh et al., (2010), Saberian et al., (2003) and Talebpour (2017), who found a significant relationship between the interference of others and violence against women. (2010) who saw the extended family as a protector against violence against women.

Participants noted that domestic violence also arises from the husband's personality traits and their unemployment and irresponsibility. Man's irritable mood and instability cause him to get aroused quickly and resort to violence. Their spouses seemed to have a state of constant anger, mood swings, impatience, and aggression, and they soon became furious. This finding is consistent with the results of research by Barratt (1994) which showed that there is an important relationship between psychological symptoms and violence, including pessimism or suspicion of others, obsession, and antisocial personality.

Male financial problems and unemployment are the factors that fuel domestic violence. Poverty may not be the main and direct cause of violence against women, but research often shows that violence is more prevalent in poor families. This finding was consistent with the results of research by Fallah et al. (2015) and Aziziyan et al. (2003), Niazi (2017) and Turk et al. (2017), which showed that one of the main causes of domestic violence is financial problems.

The inability of men to meet the emotional and social needs of women is another reason mentioned by the participating women for the violence against married women in Bamyan province. Man's irresponsibility manifests itself in the form of non-cooperation with his wife in household chores, job instability, and constant abuse of children at home. In addition, practical and behavioral aggression contributes to this problem. In fact, the inability of the man in life skills causes the man to not do well in problem solving, effective communication, and coping with stress. Fatemi et al. (2011) also found that the lower the life skills of individuals, the more spousal abuse increases. Niazi (2017) also found that couples' unfamiliarity with life skills is one of the main causes of violence.

Women also referred to the consequences of violence against women. Terrorism is a consequence of violence against women and includes physical, psychological, emotional, verbal and financial violence.

Violence begins in mild degrees, verbal violence, insults and humiliation, and progresses towards its most severe form, i.e., physical violence. In physical violence, women were beaten directly by the husband or sometimes by the husband's family. Participating women faced numerous limitations. For example, visiting and meeting their parents' families, as well as relatives, was forbidden and they were not allowed to travel with them after marriage.

In verbal violence, a man often insults his wife, and society gives this right to the man. Whenever two children fight, one of the parties must start cursing the other party's name, which causes this

type of violence to be learned from childhood. But sometimes, women do not tolerate this situation and get upset and verbal violence begins for conflict and beatings in which the injured party is also a woman.

Financial violence is another violence. Participants acknowledged that they did not receive cash from their spouse, and in some cases, their expenses were not paid because their spouse had no income. The same stresses caused by economic problems, unemployment and limited resources provide the ground for violence.

Another important consequence was the fear of the collapse of life and the consequent decision to continue living. There are different types of fear, including fear of the collapse of life, which was obtained by analyzing the participants' interviews after analyzing and extracting the main categories. Participants wanted to feel as happy as other women, let love prevail in their lives, and be respected. But not only the loss of privacy and mutual respect did not fulfill the wish, but also fear also clouded the family atmosphere. The only hope left for them is a life of violence, in which they live mostly for the sake of their children. The category of fear of the collapse of life has a sub-category (female tolerance and compromise).

### Conclusion

It can be said Although women in Bamyan are still victims of domestic violence, and despite the negative consequences of violence against women in recent years, women's awareness of their rights has led to different attitudes in this regard. In the other word increasing women's awareness and education in this field have been able to make women safe to some extent. Feeling humiliated is one of the consequences of domestic violence against women, which can complicate relationship problems.

### Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest.

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### Author's contribution

Conceptualization, H.Z.M and H.J. and Z.N.N; Methodology, H.J. and H.Z.M; Investigation, H.Z.M and H.J and Z.N.N; Formal analysis, H.J and H.Z.M; Data Curation, H.J.

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